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## Books for Children in the Russian Classics` Range of Reading: Methodological, Psycho-Pedagogical and Philosophical Potential of Russian Autobiographical Prose

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### Abstract

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The article is dedicated to the existential experience gained while reading books for children which is fixed by authors in Russian autobiographical prose. The event of reading is taken as catharsis and becomes an inner personal experience, thus it initializes person's creative feedback, such as telling stories, stylizing manner of a tale-teller (Aksakov's Sergei Bagrov), improvising in producing stories (the narrator in Samuil Marshak's autobiographical novel). This process correlates with pedagogical approach. We can observe a transformation of a reading person to a creative (writing) person, i.e. "homo legens" to "homo scribens". This creativity later becomes the basis of forming a professional writer. Images and impressions of childhood are considered both as the initial point of artists' (writers') creativity and their individual creative styles. In the present research the subject was approached with a specific methodology: comparative-historical, historico-functional and structural typological methods. The research is performed on a wide variety of Russian autobiographical prose works of XIX-XX centuries: Sergey Aksakov, Maxim Gorky, Ivan Bunin, Boris Zaitsev, Ivan Shmelev, Korney Chukovsky and Samuil Marshak.

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**Keywords:** Co-existence; humanization of education; "a reading person"; "a creative (writing) person"; autobiographical prose; philosophy; psychology; pedagogical methodology.

### 1. Introduction

The urgency of studying the phenomenon of children's books in the reading circle of Russian classics is the special interest for different humanities researchers in multicultural world.

The problem of the research is to find the effective methods of interaction between a reader and children's book. In Russian autobiographical prose, we can see the unique personal writer's experience of communication with a book. The names of these writers are included into the Russian native



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literature. Such aspect of the problem gets the particular relevance in the intercultural communication. In this case Russian classic becomes a carrier of the national consciousness and identity.

The search for answers is also represented in the article. What place does the children's literature take in the personal cognition and life experience? Didactic component of reading process is taken as the basis of research problem. This component is implemented in the formation of initial skills, the next step is to consolidate the communication skill with a book. Conditionally, such acquirement can be defined as the discovery of own creative potential and as a metamorphosis: from a reading to a writing person «homo legens — homo scribens».

Literature phenomenon in well-known classics' childhood in the Russian autobiography based fiction.

The research considers methodical, philosophical, psychological and pedagogical aspects of revealing the Russian autobiography based fiction potential.

In the present research the subject was approached with a specific methodology, comparative-historical, historico-functional and structural typological **methods**.

In referring to writers' life material P.N.Sakulin's (Sakulin P.N., 1928) and V.I. Gusev's (1999) approach gained weight: they suggest seeing the Author as a literary phenomenon, as a way of understanding his life views that are suggested in the style of his work. Our research is focused on finding typological traits that are universal for autobiography as a genre and on connecting it to a holistic approach in analysing the style of prose. Regarding an autobiographical prosaic text as a stylistic phenomenon in Russian literary tradition of the XIX-XX centuries revealed the importance of phenomena in the literary theory: the style of the époque and the author's individual style. In the tradition of V. Humboldt and A.A. Potebnya, academic P.N. Sakulin understood it as style «the idea's image» or interior form. «It is the fact that each artist finds a unique image for an idea which is common for all that makes it possible for «timeless topic», «timeless characters» etc. to exist in literary art, so the summary is: there is a possibility of coexistence of different artists, each of which has his own position in life views put into imagery» (Sakulin P.N., 1928)

The integrity of a theoretical analysis of the phenomenon of autobiographical prose is furthermore actualised by seeing pathos (from Greek, pathos – a deep feeling of passion) as an important subjective part of a prosaic text. The author's passion for the core of the depicted object creates “the real face of the work of fiction” (Losev A.F., 2010). The importance of pathos from the point of view of emotional perception is described by G.N. Pospelov, P.V. Palievsky, B.V. Tomashevsky and others. Here's what Tomashevsky wrote about the role and function of pathos: “... it is not enough (author's cursive) to tune the reader's mind into this or that tone. It is important to guide (author's cursive) his feelings. This is achieved by means of raising feelings of sympathy or, on the contrary, of hatred and contempt towards the events taking place. The text's power to convince does not lie in the field of logical proof, but in raising sympathy towards the ideas presented” (Tomashevsky, B.V., 1996).

Literature phenomenon in well-known classics' childhood cultivates hedonistic reading. Autobiography based fiction reveals the phenomenon of transformation in the process of reading a book from external experience into internal experience. The artistic level of the book is also critical for the acquisition of gaining internal experience from reading the book. A significant event in the

autobiography based fiction is connected with the beginning of reading books and the first acquaintance with the author which can be called the initial point of writer's creativity. Thus the Russian autobiography based fiction is considered to be a source of methodical, philosophical, psychological and pedagogical experience.

## 2. Research methods

The study is based on *empirical material* of a wide range of pieces of classical Russian literature (XIX-XX centuries), from Maxim Gorky and Leo Tolstoy to Ivan Bunin and Samuil Marshak. *The subject matter* of the study is the autobiographical prose of S.T. Aksakov ("Family Chronicle", 1856), M. Gorky ("Childhood", 1913; "My Apprenticeship", 1915), A.N. Tolstoy ("Nikita's Childhood", 1920 – 1922; "Memoir", 1943), I.A. Bunin ("The Life of Arseniev", 1927 – 1939; "Memories" ("Autobiographical Notes", "Diaries", 1950), B.K. Zaitsev ("Gleb's Journey", 1937 – 1953), I.S. Shmelev (sketch-book "Autobiography", 1913; "How I Became a Writer", 1929 – 1930), S.Ya. Marshak ("In the Prologue of Life. Pages of Memories", 1960), K.I. Chukovsky ("Silver Coat of Arms", 1938; "How I Became a Writer", 1978).

Personal experience of reading books of authors as a child gets a stable typological feature and is characterized by elevated pathos of poets. Thus, a novelized autobiography vividly recreates the moment of reading and experience. The eventfulness is considered by us in the context of phenomenology and existential philosophy as the co-organization of valuable human relations, in which, according to M. Heidegger the human being is not only the "being-in-the-world", but also "being-with-others". Interpretation of eventfulness by modern researcher I.G. Mineralova (2012) also became important for our work.

Let us consider the intensity of children's experiences in the prose of S.T. Aksakov. Brightness of the image memory with a detailed description of the stories "Grateful Lion" and "The Boy Dressing by Himself" from the first read book "Mirror of Virtue". He wrote in the author's comments: "I remember even the face of a lion and a boy!" (Aksakov S.T., 1955). The scale of children's impressions from the book by N.I. Novikov "Children's Reading for the Heart and Mind" exaggerates, driving mad: "I was just mad: I did not say anything, did not understand what I was said, and did not want to go to dinner" (Aksakov S.T., 1955). Communication with the book initiates in the heart of the future artist "a complete turn, and a new world opened up for me ..." (Aksakov S.T., 1955). We read in the memoirs of S.Ya. Marshak: "I still remember the smell of sweets and spices in the great bazaars of "The Thousand and One Nights" (Marshak S.Ya., 1968-1972).

I.A. Bunin describes his experience outrageously and ironically. In some children's book he dropped on a picture with an inscription that "amazed" with its last word, then still fortunately unknown to me: "Meeting a cretin in the mountains" (Bunin I.A., 1982). The dynamics of feelings is described in Bunin's expressive manner: the discovery of the word "Cretin" converts "just nasty into fearful, mysterious and even magic!" His statement sounds confessional: "And suddenly I was flushed with poetic excitement, probably that day was some kind of *the beginning of my writing?*" (Bunin I.A., 1982). In the novel "The Life of Arseniev", Bunin wrote: mostly took after Lermontov, and to a certain

degree – after Pushkin”. It was Lermontov’s poetry that “awakened”, “formed the soul”, responded to “a passionate dream of distant and beautiful”, “a cherished spiritual sound”.

A special influence of children’s books on young readers is also connected with the tradition of family reading. Thus A.N. Tolstoy wrote in his “Memoir”: “When winter came and the garden and the house were covered with snow, a hanging lamp over a round table was switched on in the dining room, a poorly furnished plastered room, and the stepfather read aloud Nekrasov, Tolstoy, Turgenev or something from a fresh book of the “Europe Reporter” (Tolstoy A.N., 1958). In “Gleb’s Journey” by B.K. Zaitsev, lost nostalgic things are glorified as the idyllic picture of family happiness: “A lamp over the table, Gogol, close people around, a large comfortable house, fields, forests of Russia – he could not understand that happiness yet, but he also could not forget this evening” (Zaitsev B.K., 1999).

Reading emphasizes the special closeness of father and son, the unity of their *sympathy* for the heroes of Gogol’s “Taras Bulba”. The father reads an episode of Ostap’s execution ... “When he reached the words “Father! Where are you? Can you hear all of this?” – and Taras answered: I hear” – the father paused, took out a handkerchief, put it to the right and then to the left eye. Gleb stood up, walked from the back and hugged and kissed him: he wanted to express all the fascination with both Gogol and his father”. The depth of apposition of psychological and aesthetic reactions is embodied in the author’s comment: “At that moment, it seemed to him that he might as well endure all the torment, and his father would be Taras” (Zaitsev B.K., 1999).

The process of identification is most vividly described by A.N. Tolstoy in “Nikita’s Childhood”, all the most emotionally intense experiences of an autobiographical hero (the first horse riding, the first love) with a wonderful transformation of reality are projected on favorite literary heroes of Fenimore Cooper and Mayne Reid.

And this is how S.Ya. Marshak describes his experience, in which the poetization of reading process receives a social connotation of antidote, or active force of confrontation with everyday reality: “Without “The Thousand and One Nights”, it would be very boring to live at our place on the Square, where one day was like another, where familiar raucous quarrels or a drunken song of an errant tailor or intestine was heard from all the houses ...” (Marshak S.Ya., 1968-1972). Reading of domestic classics creates the experience of overcoming loneliness in M. Gorky: “these books washed my soul, I felt what a good book it was, and understood its necessity for me : I’m not alone on earth and I will be alright” (Gorky M., 1951).

Gorky got a nickname of “bookworm” in the “Childhood” for his “passion for reading!”. A “good and right” book is a party for him. Empathy for heroes of Goncourt, Greenwood and Balzac awakens a feeling of authenticity of artistic truth: “there was no villains, no good souls, there were just people, *marvelously alive*” (Gorky M., 1951).

A particular relevance of the study of the phenomenon of children’s book is in the description of the first *writing* experience. Oral storytelling of tales of Scheherazade or housekeeper Pelageya by Serezha Bagrov received a creative adaptation in the author’s retelling to his sister and aunt. However, all the new stories and details bring accusations of lying to a young talent instead of the expected success. No less important is the metamorphosis of the narrator, Serezha plays a fairy tale “with all the nursery rhymes, antics, groaning and sighing of Pelageya”.

Creative improvisations of S. Ya. Marshak on the novel “Anna Karenina” by L.N. Tolstoy are called “Bustles”. A boring way from the gymnasium is decorated with a fascinating story, “Come on, Marshak, go on with your bustle”. No less creative becomes the boring final of the story, “an explosion of a barrel of gunpowder, which killed all the characters”.

In conclusion we would like to quote K.I. Chukovsky. He starts his personal experience of becoming a writer with a chronotope of his birth, in which he includes the names of literary heroes: “When I was born ... in Petersburg at Five Corners, near the Vladimir Church, all of them were still alive...” Who did the author mean by all? “Grigorovich, Goncharov, Turgenev, Walt Whitman”. He calls lucky men those people who “saw Gogol and Adam Mickiewicz with their own eyes” (Chukovsky K.I., 1965).

### 3. Results

Typological classification of literature phenomenon in well-known classics’ childhood. The most significant are the writers’ bathetic description of the reading process, a flashback of work of art perception, pattern of artistic imitation and tradition of family reading.

### 4. Conclusions

The Russian autobiography based fiction research reveals methodical, philosophical, psychological and pedagogical value. Multicultural communication emphasizes particular value of researching Russian reading tradition and development of creative abilities.

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